GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:1410
ANSWERED ON:27.11.2001
USE OF VIRULENT BIOLOGICAL AGENTS
BASUDEB ACHARIA

Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware that since the vectors used for introducing genes from one organism to another, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are highly infectious and virulent biological agents;

(b) if so, whether the risk in the use of virulent vectors for engineering novel life forum has been assessed;

(c) if not, whether it is possible to create a bio-safety network since their use for bio-terrorism becomes easier as they spread commercially around the world; and

(d) if so, the details in this regard ?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT)

(a),(b),(c)&(d). Vectors used for introducing genes from one organism to another are not virulent or infectious. A genetically modified organism (GMO) is required to be tested for safety. A case by case analysis is carried out before any GMO is introduced into the environment. Indian system of regulation is transparent in dealing with GMOs.All experiments are to pass through a three tier regulatory process. The three tier system comprise creation of an Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBSC) at the Institute/ Company where research work is carried out or where transgenic materials are developed; the Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) is a central committee serviced by the Department of Biotechnology; while the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) which is the statutory body to deal with allaspects of genetically modified organisms and products thereof is in the Ministry of Environment & Forests. These structures have been set up under Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. There are also Monitoring-cum-Evaluation Committees (MECs) to have on the spot monitoring. In testing and evaluation the large infrastructure and diverse expertise of the country from various scientific agencies is utilised.